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4 June 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Bunker's Views on Bombing Policy

1. You indicated that Ambassador Bunker's views and recommendations on US bombing policy in relation to events in South Vietnam and our position in Paris were likely to be discussed at the 4 June Presidential lunch. The specific statement of the Ambassador's views almost certain to be focussed on is that contained in paragraphs 27 - 29 and 37 - 41 of his 29 May Weekly [redacted] The text of these paragraphs is attached hereto.
2. From the Saigon angle of vision, Bunker has a cogent argument, hard to fault in a South Vietnam context. The South Vietnamese are edgy about Paris and will become markedly more so if the talks take up South Vietnamese political matters, particularly if such matters are taken up without GVN representatives present at the table. Our continued curtailment of bombing in the face of intensified VC attacks indeed does little for South Vietnamese morale. Were we to suspend the bombing altogether while the Communists continue to harass and attack South Vietnamese cities, the South Vietnamese would indeed be dismayed and many would construe this as irrefutable confirmation of their doubts about US constancy and determination.
3. The problem from the Washington perspective is that our posture and public position on bombing and related "no advantage" considerations has long been keyed only to infiltration and resupply from the North, not to activity in the South. (The ROLLING THUNDER program started in 1965 ostensibly in retaliation for attacks on US installations, particularly at Pleiku, but this fact is now forgotten ancient history.) Thus, pegging our air action against the North to Communist activity in the South would be a switch certain to generate adverse domestic and international opinion.

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4. From prior discussion of this issue, you know opinion within the Agency is divided. I personally find Bunker's argument persuasive in part and believe that it is more to our net disadvantage to contribute to a deterioration of South Vietnamese morale than to take some obloquy in the fora of US and international opinion. I hence believe that certain North Vietnamese cities should be made hostages to blatant, continuing harassment of South Vietnamese urban centers and subject to surgical retaliation. This is a view, however, with which the majority of my Agency colleagues would not agree.

George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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